

Special Series: Multimodal Inventions

The Sensible Life of Return: Collaborative Experiments in Art and Anthropology in Palestine/Israel

Kiven Stroh

ABSTRACT As a younger generation of Palestinians have started to return to the lands and villages of their parents and grandparents over the last decade, they have come to acknowledge a sensible world for which they have no immediate experience. The smell of wild za'atar, the sound of the breeze roaming the land, and the stories of trees and rocks are all experiences handed down by their parents and grandparents, heretofore unavailable to their own sensible life. This article is about a project-to-come that attends to these returns and the sensible/material worlds being invented. It is about the making of a collaboration between an anthropologist and an artist to create an experimental laboratory for Palestinians returning to their former lands and villages for speculating about their futures or what is yet to come. [*Landscape, Sensible Colonialism, Materiality, Participatory Art, Palestine/Israel*]

RESUMEN En la medida en que una generación más joven de palestinos ha empezado a regresar a las tierras y pueblos de sus padres y abuelos en la última década, han llegado a reconocer un mundo sensible para el cual no tienen experiencia inmediata. El olor de za'atar salvaje, el sonido de la brisa vagando por la tierra, y las historias de árboles y rocas son todas experiencias transmitidas por sus padres y abuelos, hasta este momento no disponibles para su propia vida sensible. Este artículo es acerca de un proyecto por venir que atiende a estos retornos y los mundos materiales/sensibles siendo inventados. Es acerca de formar una colaboración entre un antropólogo y un artista para crear un laboratorio experimental para los palestinos que regresan a sus tierras y pueblos antiguos para especular acerca de sus futuros, o, lo que aún está por venir. [*paisaje, colonialismo sensible, materialidad, arte participativo, Palestina/Israel*]

شرع في العقد الأخير جيل شاب من الفلسطينيين في العودة إلى أراضي وقرى الأهل والأجداد، ملتجئين بذلك عالما محسوسا لم يدركوه مباشرة حتى الآن. فشدوا الزعتر، وهفيف النسيم هائما من فوق التراب، وحكايا الشجر والحجر، هي تجارب يسلمها الأباء والأجداد والجدات للأحفاد الذين لم يحظوا بها في حياتهم المحسوسة. تعنى هذه المقالة بمشروع عتيد يسبر أغوار هذه العودة وما تبذعه من المضامين المادية والحسية. فهي أي المقالة، تنبثق عن عمل مشترك للباحث الأنثروبولوجي والفنانة (منال محاميد) يسعيان عبره لإيجاد مختبرا يخدم الفلسطينيين العائدين لأراضيهم وقراهم، فيستبصرون منه مستقبلهم أو مجرد ما هو آت. مشهد: استعمار حسّي؛ مادية؛ فن مشارك؛ فلسطين / إسرائيل

And so I come to the place itself,
 but the place is not
 its dust and stones and open space.
 For where are the red-tailed birds
 and the almond's green?
 Where are the bleating lambs
 and pomegranates of evening—
 the smell of bread
 and the grouse?
 Where are the windows,
 and where is the ease of Amira's braid?
 Where are the quails
 and white-footed fettered horses whinnying,
 and their right leg alone set free?
 Where are the wedding parties of swallows—
 the rites and feasts of the olives?
 The joy of the branching spikes of wheat?
 And where is the crocus's eyelash?
 Where are the fields we played
 our games of hide-and-seek in?
 And where is Qasim?
 Where are the hyssop and thyme?
 —Taha Muhammad Ali, *The Place Itself, or I Hope You Can Digest It*

Freedom is the negotiation of ghosts on a haunted landscape; it does not exorcise the haunting but works to survive and negotiate it with flair.

—Anna Tsing, *The Mushrooms at the End of the World* (2015)

Iqrit, April 18, 2009 (Figure 1). A crisp blue sky dotted with soft white clouds. I stared out at the landscape below. Nestled within a thick bed of weeds and wild growth, the ruins of a former village, a handful of stones peeking through, their soft and pale brown skins contrasting with the surrounding dark and thick flora. At the center, a narrow dirt worn path cuts across the space, intimating that living beings might still haunt this former village. At my feet, old stone stairs, also now overgrown, though not enough to hide their descent toward the ruins waiting below. Meanwhile, behind me, sharing the hill on which I stand, the landscape continues: a Greek Orthodox church and a few temporary-looking sheds made of corrugated metal, with one spray-painted with the words, in Arabic: “One day we will return.” My first impressions of this former village are, however, clouded by my ignorance; it is a landscape impaired by what I do not yet know.

This was my first trip out of Haifa since beginning fieldwork a month before, a road trip with Bilal and Nael, two friends from Haifa I had met through Adalah at the start of my fieldwork, to the northern part of Israel, al-Jalil (the Galilee). They had been promising me such a trip for weeks, but they never let on where they were planning to take me. As we made our way out of Haifa, first stopping at the famous Abu Said in Akka for a hummus-ful breakfast, we headed into the hills of al-Jalil. There was nothing exceptional about the road trip to start: a typically mundane Israeli highway with little traffic, it being Saturday. But no more than half an hour after leaving Akka, without warning, Bilal turned off the highway onto an unmarked side road to the right.¹ Slowly moving around a bend as we gently climbed

the small side road, ahead I saw the church and, nearby, a sign saying “Welcome to Iqrit” (in Arabic, Hebrew, and English). Iqrit is a former Palestinian village located about twenty-five kilometers northeast of Akka, near the Lebanese border, visible from the village. On October 31, 1948, the Israeli army occupied the village. Then, not a week later, on November 5, it removed villagers at gunpoint, with the villagers being promised they would be able to return in two weeks following military operations in the area to no avail (Jiryis 1976, 91). While some of the villagers are rumored to have ended up in Lebanon, most remained inside what would become Israel in nearby Rama and Haifa, and today number around 1,500. They had become internally displaced persons, or, as Israeli settler-colonial law designated them, “present absentees” (Sabbagh-Khoury 2009; Schechla 2001). In July 1951, the villagers of Iqrit petitioned the Israeli Supreme Court demanding their right to return, and the court ruled in their favor. Soon after the ruling, however, the military government, or administration, under which all Palestinians inside Israel were subject until 1967 (Robinson 2013), asserted that due to ongoing military operations in the area, any idea of return would be impossible. While the villagers were waiting for their appeal to be heard, the Israeli Defense Forces, in a move undoubtedly meant to thwart any possibility of their return, moved in and destroyed the village entirely on Christmas Eve 1951 (Jiryis 1976, 92), leaving only the cemetery and St. Mary's, a Greek Orthodox Church. During the 1970s, villagers staged sit-ins in the church, garnering sympathy from some in the Israeli public for allowing their return. In response, Golda Meir stated the real reason for not allowing their return: “It is not only consideration of security [that prevents] an official decision regarding Kafr Bir'im and Iqrit, but the desire to avoid [setting] a precedent. We cannot allow ourselves to become more and more entangled and to reach a point from which we are unable to extricate ourselves” (cited in Benvenisti 2000, 325–26).

If my interest in Iqrit started with my visit in 2009, it was reignited in 2012 as I followed the story of a group of young Palestinians who had decided to return to Iqrit, their family village, without permission from the state. For many years, the villagers of Iqrit, both young and old, have held annual “Roots Camps” in the village as an opportunity to continue to share the history of the village as well as keep the village itself alive (for example, through maintenance of the church and adjacent grounds).² It is an opportunity to maintain familial and communal relations within a settler-colonial state in which they've been dispersed. Taking such efforts further, and in response to the continued refusals of the state to allow them to return, in August 2012 two dozen Palestinian third-generation youth returned to Iqrit. Setting up tents and makeshift conveniences next to the church, they came in shifts, assuring someone was always in the village. Taking their right of return rather than waiting for the permission of the state, they had returned to their village



FIGURE 1. Michael Halak, *Iqrith* (2015). Oil on panel. (Image used with permission of the artist). [This figure appears in color in the online issue]

after sixty-seven years. A committee was then organized in the summer of 2013 to develop a plan for how to build a modern community, including homes and a school, for the villagers in exile. They also put together a project for working out the legal and technical challenges facing the refugees in implementing the right of return. However, on June 8, 2014, the Israeli Lands Administration arrested three of these youth—Wala Sbeit, Nidal Houry, and Jeries Khiatt—uprooting trees and confiscating tents and furniture in the process.

Most intriguing for me has been not simply the audacity of their return, which should not be underestimated, but the life of return that was being enacted. Returning to Iqrit was not simply a matter of refusing their status as settler-colonial subjects by flouting the law; rather, their return was sensible, which is to say it was about touching, smelling, hearing, seeing, and tasting the land off which their families had been forced off (a returning of Palestine). The life of return, in other words, was about rekindling or remaking the sensible relation to the former village. Indeed, when talking a couple years later with some of those involved in the initial return to Iqrit, conversations were woven with stories of planting gardens and eating (and tasting) what they had grown, of looking out over the horizon toward Lebanon and Haifa, of hearing the sounds of the winds, of the splendor of the sunrise, singing traditional songs, dancing the *dabka*.³ The life of return was a sensible life, a matter of sensing the land and village, and a reconfiguring of the settler-colonial landscape.

With Iqrit as a nodal point, over the last few years I have been in conversations with friends in Haifa about a potential project that would attend to these lives of return, to the sensible lives being enacted and how they are reconfiguring the settler-colonial landscape and imagining what is still possible. As conversations evolved, however, it became dramatically clear there is more such a project should do; that is, there is an obligation to think about the project as part of the social world of which it would be involved in and not just as research to be carried off to conferences and published in academic venues. In short, what does such a project contribute to these lives of return? Following Law and Urry (2004, 392), the imperative would be to embrace

the project as a mode of social practice in which it would “work upon, and within, the social world, helping in turn to make and remake it.” By attending to “the happening” of the social world, “its ongoingness, relationality, contingency, sensuousness” (Lury and Wakeford 2012, 3), the project would thus be conceived as a device or *dispositif* that enables the reconfiguring of relations between people and things. Working upon and within this social world, it would be attuned to possible futures not yet determined (Savransky, Wilkie, and Rosengarten 2017), or what also could be called inventions of what comes next, that are at play as Palestinians reconfigure their sensible relation to the land (cf. Rancière 2000). Having worked closely with a number of Palestinian artists since 2009, whose work often engenders an attentiveness to such immanent futures for Palestinians, I immediately conceived this as a collaborative project between myself and an artist, such that it would invite a meeting of different ways of relating to the world as a space of experimentation (see Marcus 2010). The space of collaboration, in other words, is conceived as a speculative device for enabling an experimentation in futures otherwise, of living beyond the dead ends and impossibilities of a settler-colonial logic.

In what follows, I offer an image of this project by putting forward the methods of a collaborative project, a working-together of anthropologist (myself) and artist Manal Mahamid. Manal is a Palestinian multimedia artist from Muaweya, near Umm El Fahem, whose work takes up the vexed questions of the Palestinian landscape within a settler-colonial situation in experimental and playful ways.⁴ The impetus for our collaboration stems from a shared concern with the sensible life of Palestinian existence, from relations with the land itself to the various lives, animal and otherwise, that inhabit the landscape, both past and present. Working with Kamel Farms, a permaculture farming project started by Nasser Rego in 2017, our project is to create a laboratory for experiments in reconfiguring the settler-colonial landscape in Palestine/Israel.⁵ With one of the core principles of permaculture farming being the making of new communities through an ecological ethic (Mollison 1979), it is not surprising that it (and eco-farming more generally) has become a vital practice among Palestinians seeking to maintain their

relationships with the land in a settler-colonial context (see Brunk 2016; Leifer 2018; Tesdell 2013; Weihe 2006). Our collaboration works alongside this ambition through a participatory or social art project that invites young Palestinians to experiment in what Tina Campt (2017, 60, 123) calls a “resemblance in dispossession,” a process of generating relations through “fugitive practices of refusal” of a settler-colonial reality.⁶ Working with and across anthropology and art, this project takes a multimodal approach to knowledge production: a plurality of ways of knowing whose method embraces the performative and inventive within collaboration as a speculative practice. Not simply an epistemological project of describing the world as it is, this art/anthropology collaboration is ontological, a speculative practice of worlding. The following, atypically, is a prefiguring of such a worlding project and thus, as such, a mapping of an unfolding of what is still possible in Palestine/Israel and between art and anthropology.

A SENSIBLE COLONIALISM

To date, the predominant focus of critical research on the Zionist settler-colonial project has been on its diverse discursive practices, specifically the body of laws, rules, and institutions directed toward the dispossession and erasure of Palestinians (cf. Forman and Kedar 2004). As important as these engagements are, there is a further dimension that draws only scant attention: the sensible. It is of course true that recent works have pointed to and highlighted how different forms of sensibility—most notably, visibility—are laden with power relations in Palestine/Israel (e.g., Hochberg 2015; Weizman 2007), but the wider reach of sensible practices in Palestine/Israel still remains underappreciated.⁷ Indeed, one of the neglected aspects of the Zionist settler-colonial project in Palestine is its sensible colonization; in short, alongside the various discursive practices in use is an elimination of the Palestinian through a severing or rupturing of their sensible world. There is a colonization of that which can be tasted, touched, smelled, seen, and heard, such that to remove Palestinians from their lands is to also remove their sensible relation to them (Rancière 2000). The emphasis here is less on the sensory, with its attention to the cultural shaping of sensorial worlds, than it is on the sensible, a relation of the senses with a world where the relation is constitutive. To illuminate the practice of sensible colonization, let me provide a telling case in point. In 1977, the state of Israel made it illegal for anyone to harvest, store, or sell *za'atar*, or *hyssop*, making it a crime punishable under the law (to date all arrests have been of Palestinians).⁸ The scientific claim was *za'atar* needed to be put under protected-plant status, though as Eghbariah (2017) has recently argued, the rationale had more to do with repression and control of Palestinian culture. Eghbariah notes that this law rested on the Zionist settler-colonial arrogance that Palestinians, as a people backwards and inferior in the way they related to land and flora, lacked the proper understanding and knowledge to protect the land.⁹ More

conspicuously, for Palestinians at least, the criminalization of *za'atar* was part of a broader Zionist agenda to continue removing Palestinians from their lands and, as subjects within a settler-colonial project, to continue their elimination (Wolfe 1999).¹⁰

The connection of Palestinians with their lands, in addition to or alongside being a legal or juridical matter, an issue pertaining solely to laws and rights, is also a sensible relation, a relation of taste, smell, touch, sound, and visibility with the world. One does not simply taste *za'atar*; one smells it in the fields, in the home when it is laid out to dry, and on the hands as it is being rubbed down in preparation for making the *za'atar* spice mix. One touches it as one picks it, as it is rubbed, and as it moves into the mouth and comes into contact with the tongue. One hears it as it is removed from the plant in the field and as it crumbles after being dried. One sees it in fields, in the home, in the market, on food. This sensible relation is a powerful dimension within the Palestinian relation to their lands and subsequently to sociality itself. As Rochelle Davis (2011, 172) notes in her wonderful book on Palestinian village histories:

For many people who return to visit their villages and homes, an important part of the visit is to gather herbs and grape leaves and eat the fruits of the remaining trees. These acts, occurring daily, yearly, or once in a lifetime, are embodied performances of what it means to be from the village—not only doing what one (or one's ancestors) used to do, but also ingesting the place by consuming the land's produce.¹¹

The synesthetic and even haptic experience of wild *za'atar*, and of land more broadly, is central to Palestinian sociality, an attachment that fosters collective memory and a sense of belonging. As François Laplantine (2015, 82; see also Chau 2008) has aptly put it, “political togetherness is also sensible togetherness.”

Yet, as I have so far hinted, sensory experience is only one side of the sensible. To sense is to sense something; that is, the sensible is the relation between the senses and a material world.¹² Focused on the senses as an object of study, or more accurately on sensory models “according to which the members of that society ‘make sense’ of the world” (Classen 1997, 402), sensory studies have often tended to occult that which is sensed, those vibrant material things that are necessary to sensing itself (Tilley and Cameron-Daum 2017). For Palestinians to engage the sensible life of return is to engage an herb, a fruit, a rock, a tree, an animal, an insect, and so on. Yet, this material world is not inert or passive, a blank canvas for the inscription of meaning. Materials do things; they have “agentic” capacities. They are part of a world of what Latour (1996, 373) refers to as actants, “something that acts or to which activity is granted by others An actant can literally be anything provided it is granted to be the source of an action.” For Palestinians, the agentic capacities of materials and horizontality of humans/nonhumans is unmistakably manifest in the ways they talk about their lands, former villages, and homes; they not only talk about the lives they led, the memories, or the people, but they also

talk about the stories told by stones, trees, dust, plants, seasons, skies. Take the following from Deeb Kan'aan (cited in Davis 2011, 159), from his documentary history, or “village book”:

The homeland is the relationship between a person and their environment and all that it contains of people, animals, birds, plants, stones, and earth. If you visit the ruins with a guide, you'll find the stones and trees will tell stories, and you'll enter a world where the dead live and the place throbs with life, surrounded by relatives and friends.¹³

Of course, for the generation that experienced the onset of the Nakba in 1948, these stones and trees are “objects of memory” (Slyomovics 1998), meaningful because they've been imbued with significance by humans, by those former villagers. As we'll see shortly, for a younger generation who does not share this experience, the significance of these objects of memory are less obvious, their meaning less determined and open to reconfiguration.

Crucially, sensible colonization has long been directed at severing and dividing the sensory from the material, in turn rupturing Palestinian social life, displacing and separating a people as part of a comprehensive ideology of “spacio-cide” (Hanafi 2012). It is aimed at removing Palestinians from their lands, from the plants, stones, and earth, and their subsequent destruction, either through the destruction of the village itself, the creation of parks and nature reserves, or the renaming of villages and their re-inhabitation by Jewish settlers, so as to remove any trace of their prior existence. Without a relation to this former material world, without the “people, animals, birds, plants, stones, and earth,” Palestinians and their historical presence is erased—or worse, Palestinians find themselves with an ossified material world that becomes static and even anachronistic, apposite only in terms of the past.¹⁴ Indeed, if physical and symbolic destruction is an attempt to efface the material to which the sensory is bound, for Palestinians to return to their lands, as in the case of Iqrit, is to suture this sensible relation and refuse the settler-colonial project that continues to overwrite, ignore, and forget their historical presence (Davis 2011, 18–19). It is important to recall that for younger Palestinians, especially those born since the 1980s, there has never been that close relationship with the land that their parents and grandparents had, hence returning to the land, whether the previous villages of their families or to the growing community of farms, is a new experience. As Nasser, the founder of Kamel Farms, writes, this is a generation that is rethinking and reinventing its relationship to the Nakba:

Palestinians are breaking the mold in their engagement with the Nakba in so many diverse and beautiful ways. In doing so, they reinscribe themselves in the very soil from which they have been forcibly separated for generations. In these acts, they are actively remembering. In these performances, they are not only surviving, but thriving, creating trajectories of possibility for independence and self-sustainability. (Rego 2016)

If the sensible life of return, of reinscribing, is an entanglement of the sensory and material, of taste, smell, touch,

sound, and visibility, and a material world of stones and trees that tell stories, where and how do we find and work with this “intra-activity” (Barad 2007), the co-constitution of material and human for creating alternative trajectories of independence and self-sustainability? In the case of Palestine, the sensible life of return, quite distinctly, occurs within the landscape—a former place of habitation and environmental interaction (Olwig 1996, 630). Yet this isn't a pre-given or prefigured landscape to which one returns, a landscape in which the relation between the sensory and the material is already established, with a distance between the viewer and the scene. Rather, landscapes are the sites for the intra-activity of the sensory and material, of taste, smell, touch, sound, visibility, and “people, animals, birds, plants, stones, and earth”—processes of arranging, organizing and fitting together, or what Deleuze and Guattari (1980) call *agencements* (see also Nail 2017). Landscapes as assemblages, or *agencements*, are not fixed or given configurations or unities but ongoing, relational, contingent, sensuous comings together, what Olwig (1996), returning to old usages, refers to as “moots” or gatherings.

One might liken this sensible life of return to recent writings on the production of affect and place. As Navaro-Yashin (2009) has argued, the production of affect is not a matter of deciding between subjects and places, an either/or. Rather, insofar as the relation between subjects and places are “historically contingent and politically specific assemblages” (9), both subjects and places “produce and transmit affect *relationally*” (14). Yet, for Navaro-Yashin, this relationality is one in which affect remains a property of subjects and places, with the former producing affect through “symbolizing, interpreting, politicizing, understanding, and projecting their conflicts,” while the latter possesses a capacity to discharge affect. Here, the production of affect is less relational than dialectical, with already given subjects and places producing their own affects. In short, in her effort to bypass the “either/or” of subjects/places as producers of affect, Navaro-Yashin unwittingly curtails the radical potential of a relational mode that would posit affect as prior to either subject or place. *Pace* Navaro-Yashin, I want to emphasize how sensible landscapes might be thought of as “relational entities, entanglements of human and non-human elements, that co-constitute each other” (Duineveld, van Assche, and Beunen 2017, 375). In short, the sensible, much like affect, is not the property of either subjects or places but is an intra-activity, a constitutive between through which historically contingent and politically specific assemblages or landscapes emerge.

W. J. T. Mitchell (2000, 207) once wrote, “Palestine has been reduced to the status of a landscape: framed, hedged about, shaped, controlled, and surveilled from every possible perspective.” Palestinian landscapes are, to be sure, sites of power relations between a Zionist settler-colonial project and an indigenous Palestinian people.¹⁵ However, these landscapes of Palestine are not uncontested, as returning Palestinians are witness. The reduced landscape of

Palestine, which Mitchell describes, is “inseparable from the lines or coefficients of deterritorialization, passages, and relays toward other assemblages” (Deleuze and Guattari 1980, 410). We find ourselves, instead, with landscapes not as scenery, as fixed, neutral, or natural, but instead as modes for thinking about “community, justice, and ecological equity” (Olwig 1996, 630–31). Landscapes, I am proposing, are the sites of struggle in Palestine/Israel: the sensible life of return, as landscapes/*agencements*, is an event of reterritorialization or reassemblage (Campt 2017), “open-ended gatherings” (Tsing 2015, 23) that happen in the entanglements of sensory and material worlds. Here, I build on Tsing’s (2015) recent work on Matsutake, where she writes that for her, “landscapes are places for patchy assemblages” (304n3), by exploring landscapes *as* assemblages.

In thinking about landscapes as assemblages of humans and things, I am proposing a way of conceptualizing these returns and the refiguring of the relationship of Palestinians with the land. It is about the social relations created in such efforts, of living life in a settler-colonial state. It is also about a place to do anthropological work, of a collaborative project that attends to these landscapes/assemblages. Yet the aim is not merely to represent these returns, to offer up a repetition of stories told and actions done; it is, first, an intravention within emergent landscapes/assemblages, a collaboration conceived as “speculative device” (Parisi 2012, 238) through which the “plurality of the present, one that provides resources for resistance, one out which unexpected events may erupt, and alternative futures may be created” (Savransky, Wilkie, and Rosengarten 2017, 8). It is an experimentation between thought and material, between a not-yet and a what-is that, in reconfiguring sensible life, invents modes of thinking and seeing a “political otherwise” (Povinelli 2012, 460–61).

ART/ANTHROPOLOGY COLLABORATIONS

In the fall of 2016, I sent a message to my friend Nasser.¹⁶ I was curious to know how he and his family were doing in Goa after having moved there the year before.¹⁷ To my surprise, Nasser told me that he and his family were returning to Nazareth in the coming weeks, and that once back, he was preparing to buy land to start a farm.¹⁸ As Nasser told me about how he had spent the year in Goa learning and teaching permaculture farming, a system of agriculture and social design where attention to ecological principles of working with nature joins up with creating, and with echoes of Iqrit still in my head, I was immediately intrigued. Our conversations picked up over the coming months, my eagerness to develop a project with him and the farm slowly growing. In the summer of 2017, we met in Nazareth to talk about what we could do together. He was still looking for land for the farm, and I was still thinking through what such a project might look like.¹⁹

In the fall of 2016, shortly after talking with Nasser, and then again when I was in Haifa for fieldwork in the summer of 2017, I had the chance to talk with friends, many

of whom are artists, some sociologists and anthropologists, and share with them my nascent project of how to attend to the sensible relation that was taking place in these returns and how Nasser’s farm would be an ideal space to develop such a project. The principles of permaculture farming aligned with the broader movement of Palestinians returning to their lands, most specifically around the idea of gatherings or moots, of building and creating community (indeed, many both inside and outside of Palestine/Israel see permaculture as a social movement). As our conversations evolved, it became increasingly clear to me that this project couldn’t be limited to documenting and describing the sensible life taking place at the farm; rather, it had to attend to this sensible life and take in the landscape/assemblage. An ethnography cannot leave off at a description of the world; it must be part of the remaking of the world. As Stuart McLean (2017, 47–48) poignantly puts it: “What if instead anthropology were to entertain the possibility that its most radical potential to intervene in the world consisted not in describing an assumed to be given reality but in putting such a reality into question?” Yet, while I knew the project was to be a collaboration with Manal, that it would be more than a description of a given world and that it would be a matter of performing into being new realities, the exact shape of the project and how it would work still remained elusive.

From the outset, Manal and I agreed that this project needed to intervene in the life of the farm and sensible life of return taking place. We further agreed that such a project must enjoin people to experiment with relations between senses and materials—to affirm the playfulness, creativity, and plasticity between touch, smell, taste, visibility, audibility, and the material world around them. This led us to start with building a laboratory for those who visit the farm, either as volunteers or as regular farm hands, a site to think and play with the relations between the senses and the material world as experiments in the sensible life of return. The idea for the lab, here approached as a third space or para-site (Marcus 2012), borrows from the first principle of permaculture design: namely, to observe and interact (Holmgren 2002). The principle is foundational, setting in motion the relation between human and nonhuman. On the one hand, it is “the imperative to renew and expand our observational skills” where the “icon for this principle is a person as a tree, emphasising ourselves in nature and transformed by it” (13). On the other hand, to interact is to recognize the “interplay between observer and subject” and how this “reveals new and dynamic aspects” of their relation (14). As Holmgren notes: “The accumulation of the experiences of observation and interaction build the skill and the wisdom needed both to intervene sensitively in existing systems and to creatively design new ones” (14). In the context of Palestine, permaculture farming has grown steadily over the last few decades as a means to both provide ecological sustainability and resist the ongoing destruction of land, industrial agriculture, desertification, and Israeli control of water and land resources, all of which push Palestinians into

a dependent relationship with Israel (see Weihe 2006). Our laboratory is premised on this first principle of permaculture design in creating a site for observation and interaction—a principle, coincidentally, shared by both anthropologists and many contemporary artists,²⁰ all the while exploring how these relations are co-constitutive of the world, human and nonhuman. At the same time, it is about working with a permaculture farming movement in Palestine in its efforts to refuse colonial dependence.

The inspiration for this laboratory as an experimental space stems from Manal's recent artwork *On the Origin* (see Figures 2 and 3). Over the summer of 2017, I was asked to contribute a small essay for a catalog on her work following the exhibition of her work as part of the show *Sensorial Immunity* at Gallery One in Ramallah.²¹ My essay thinks with her artwork, which, through video and sculpture, explores the cactus fruit and its significance for a younger generation that did not experience the Nakba of 1948 (though are still living it) and therefore do not have the same relationship to the land as their parents and grandparents (Figure 2). The cactus, like za'atar, oranges, poppies, and the olive tree, is a powerful symbol within the Palestinian narrative, representing the steadfastness and patience of a people dispossessed. Seeing a cactus driving down the road is a sensory experience, a bodily reminder of former villages and their now disappeared and dispersed lives. These foreign plants, which once formed the boundaries of villages as well as the fences for corralling livestock and keeping predators at bay, are all that remain. The stubborn cacti are the living trace of an attachment to the land. They are strangers marking the presence of an absence. The cactus also is a symbol for Jewish Israelis: the new Jew. If the cactus represents Palestinian patience, persistence, steadfastness, for Israeli Jews it is a metonym, not a metaphor. Sabra/Sabras: The native born. Prickly on the outside, sweet on the inside. This isn't a naïve contestation over the land and its symbols; it is again another appropriation by the settler colonizer, the slow process of the elimination of the native and the nativization of the colonizer. It is za'atar, hummus, falafel, labneh, shakshouka, Jaffa oranges, Ein Hod. Settler colonialism, it will be recalled, always begins in the sensible, between what can be seen, heard, smelled, tasted, and felt, and the material world.

On the Origin isn't a depiction of a cactus (*sabr*) but its fruit (*kouz sabr*). It is a work whose subject is once removed from its origin, addressed to the next generation. Cacti are makers of succulent prickly pears, enjoyed during the summer months, especially July, when the heat permeates every pore. One has to be careful with these fruits, their prickly thorny skins demanding not only dexterity but attentiveness. We must attend to the fruit. Only then, patiently and with anticipation, will a bowl of cactus fruit appear and a feast begin. It is the movement of the land into the home, of absent villages into the mouths and stomachs of families and friends. But Manal isn't interested in depicting this fruit as such, over there, beholden to nostalgia, melancholy, longing. She wants to know what this fruit can do. She wants us

to pick it up. She asks us to touch it, smell it, taste it, feel it, look at it, listen to it. We see the fruit at play. A bronze bust (Figure 4), hair curlers, a toy. It is washed, cut, painted, hung (Figures 2 and 3). The artist at play, her kids at play. The classical form of the bust in bronze, the metal of the everyday Arab world, *as if* from a forgotten past. Children at play, board games, painting it, threading it. It is a sensible relation, even an aesthetic relation in which what things (prickly pears, board games, cords, humans, etc.) can do turns on "talking to one another, apprehending one another, comprehending one another" (Morton 2013, 66). A tangle of trajectories and possibilities, Manal's artwork invites us to imagine new connections, new relations that undo and refuse what we already think we know, where what has become ossified and stuck must be reimagined. The prickly cactus and my hair, maybe a game, a bit of paint, a cord. There are games you can and must play. Something is happening. Are we ready to attend to it? Are we ready to play?

As we continued to discuss this artwork, as we talked about the imperative to attend to the material world from which Palestinians have been separated, we quickly found a common voice about how returns to the land are sensible in nature, a matter of touching, tasting, smelling, listening, and seeing that demands playful and creative experimentation for a generation of Palestinians who were born and raised without this sensible life. With *On the Origin* as our starting point, we approached Kamel Farms as a space for a participatory art project in which local residents and young people are invited to reassemble sensible relations. The principal idea is to provide an experimental laboratory for local residents and young people to come together and explore relations between the land and the sensory by interacting, observing, researching, presenting, and reflecting, all principles at the heart of permaculture farming. As part of our collaboration, Manal and I will facilitate these modes of experimentation that are participative, or what might be called "collective experiments" (Latour 2011).²² These creations might derive from such everyday practices on the farm as planting and building structures, sharing knowledge about farming and cultivation, cooking and sharing meals. The underlying logic of the lab would be to foster an atmosphere for the participative happening of social life as an impetus for creating "configurations of what comes next" (Lury and Wakeford 2012, 6), not as a future that remains a hope but, as Campit (2017, 17) elucidates:

a performance of a future that hasn't yet happened but must. It is an attachment to a belief in what should be true, which impels us to realize that aspiration. It is the power to imagine beyond current fact and to envision that which is not, but must be. It's a politics of prefiguration that involves living the future now—as imperative rather than subjunctive—as a striving for the future you want to see, right now, in the present.

The point here is the creation of spaces for experimentation in which the future is present, not a promise to come but a future that is immanent within the settler-colonial present. If our collaboration is about refiguring the farm



FIGURE 2. Manal Mahamid, *On the Origin* (2017). Images from video. (Used with permission of the artist). [This figure appears in color in the online issue]

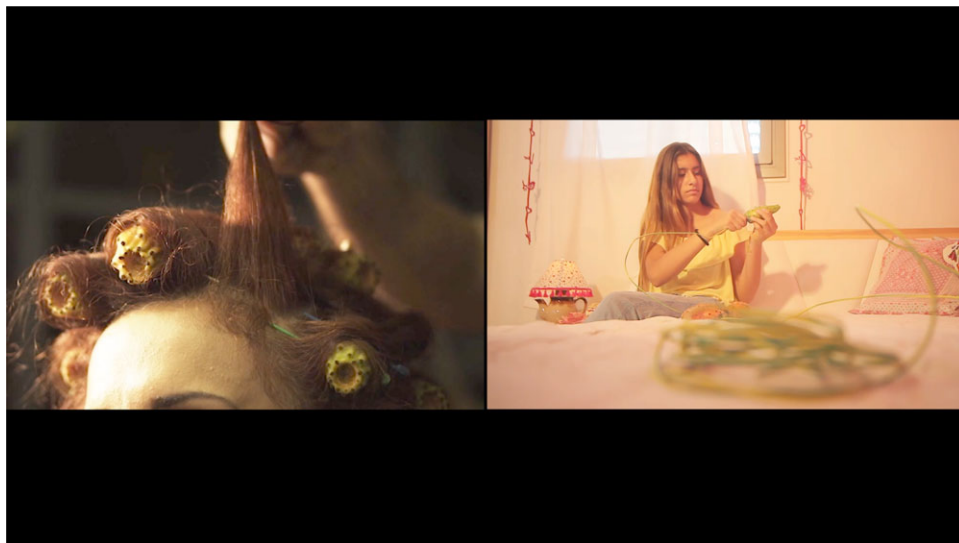


FIGURE 3. Manal Mahamid, *On the Origin* (2017). Images from video. (Used with permission of the artist). [This figure appears in color in the online issue]

as a lab for experiments in living a future in the present, the participatory artistic creations are therefore less about imagining what might be, of a future-to-come, but instead are modes of reassembling the sensible within an unfinished present. For many Palestinians with whom I spoke, such undertakings are wrought with both fear and excitement as they carry within them not only the wrath of the settler-colonial state but also a potential for its reconfiguring. Indeed, as I witnessed over the years of my fieldwork, at different moments Palestinians would frequently assert their presence through “fugitive performances” (Camp 2017) that refused the terms of the settler colonizer, such as when Walaa Sbeit, Nidal Khoury, and Jeries Khiatt refused to recognize the laws of the state when returning to Iqrit in 2012. My col-

laboration with Manal is meant to create a space for such fugitive performances as experiments in living a future now.

COLLABORATION AS SPECULATIVE DEVICE

Given the general buzz and haze that surrounds the notion of collaboration, it is necessary to clarify what I mean by this idea and how it is employed as a method in this project. The root of the word, as we well know, points to the co-laboring of different people in the pursuit of a particular goal. Such acts of collaborating can happen between people who share the same or similar fields or practices, though more often it is directed toward those acts that reach across disciplinary/expertise boundaries (Holmes and Marcus 2008). These types of collaboration that work across



FIGURE 4. Manal Mahamid, *On the Origin 2* (2017). (Image used with permission of the artist). [This figure appears in color in the online issue]

disciplinary/expertise boundaries are common in anthropology, working as we do most often with nonanthropologists: scientists, artists, shamans, “cultural others,” local experts, and so on. In fact, as Estalella and Sánchez Criado (2015) highlight, these crossings reveal an elaboration of research methods by those with whom we work, invalidating the very notion of a division of knowledge labor upon which anthropology has been founded. We thus begin with a “working together,” the anthropologist and artist, scientist, lay expert, and so on. Though in this “working together” we find

ourselves in situations where we are confronted with different (and at times opposing) ways of seeing and thinking, with our expertise one among many, these moments are equally generative of “unforeseeable knowledges, events, and encounters” (Dattatreyan and Marrero-Guillamón, introduction).

We can agree, I hope, that fieldwork is an intervention within a social world that creates not just encounters and exchanges but also participates in an “enacting of the social” that is not just descriptive but also performative (Law and Urry 2004). To a degree, fieldwork is thus always already collaborative, always already a working together (though not necessarily sharing a goal) for the invention of new relations, entities, subjectivities, worlds (Dattatreyan and Marrero-Guillamón, introduction). Here, it is important to remember that knowledge is produced not discovered; such interventions and enactments are the conditions of possibility for anthropological knowledge and as such invite different methods for thinking the world. It is in this sense that we must surely acknowledge that there is a collaborating always already at work within fieldwork, however minimal it may be. Without this minimal degree of collaboration, from asking questions to disagreeing, there would be no encounter or exchange, no fieldwork, no field, no knowledge.

Yet it follows that we do not enter into these interventions and enactments without a problem or question. These problems or questions might be our own, formulated before fieldwork proper, or, better, they might be problems and questions we’ve worked out with those we work with in the field. Regardless, our fieldwork itself is constituted and emerges through these particular problems or questions: they direct where we go, who we talk to, and the conversations we initiate and in which take part. This is our intervention. In other words, knowledge emerges as part and parcel of the questions and problems that are transformed over the process of fieldwork. Most importantly, however, these collaborations also redirect and lead us to new questions and problematizations. They engender new directions in our research, appealing to new questions and

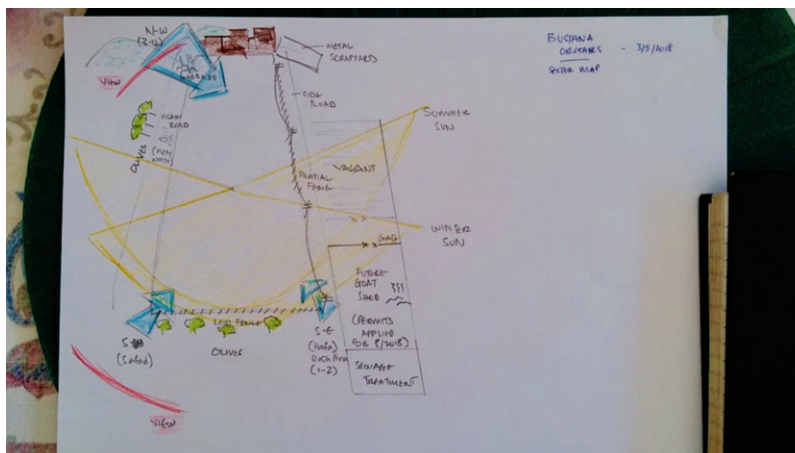


FIGURE 5. Permaculture design for Kamel Farms, Nasser Rego (2018). [This figure appears in color in the online issue]


problems that were unforeseen at the start, but also changing those questions and problems. In the present project, the problem is one of living in a settler-colonial state that seeks your disappearance, such that to engage with this problem is to imagine other ways of living than that imposed. It is to imagine other futures, to speculate about alternative cultural and political configurations. It is this experimental dimension, this invention of lines of flight, of other ways of living, that is often elided in discussions of collaborative methods. Yet they are at the very heart of collaboration and are what most distinctly distinguishes it as a speculative device (see Parisi 2012).

Taking collaboration as a speculative device that organizes material and the social world for experimentation, we recognize the stubbornness of reality. Yet we cannot but help transcend this obstinate reality by inviting a flight from it (Parisi 2012, 237). Again, a speculative device creates the situations that make research possible, while at the same time, the conditions for the appearing of the research object, for creating what Rheinberger (1997, 28) refers to as “epistemic things”—in this case, alternative sensible relations and configurations. Returning to the landscapes/assemblages—that is, those practices in which the plants and trees, rocks, insects and animals, the villagers and volunteers, activists and farmers, anthropologist and artist are gathered as *agencements*, or layerings and arrangements of material, technical and discursive elements that invent new worlds—the anthropologist and artist are necessarily part of these landscapes/assemblages, becoming collaborators in the creating of spaces of experimentation.

The anthropology that results from such collaborations is speculative; no longer a practice confined to an epistemological project, anthropology also becomes an ontological practice, itself a project of worlding and immanence (see McLean 2017). It is a project of what Ong (2011) calls “worlding” in the sense of a folding of a present and a future to enact an otherwise within the present that “connects, enchants, and wreaths with what might be” (Rao 2014, 19). Reconfiguring a place, whether in “changing material infrastructure, political possibilities, aesthetic forms—is, by definition aspirational, experimental, and even speculative” (Ong 2011, 12). It is in the performing of new realities that collaborations between anthropology and art offer the potential for modes of co-arranging, laying out, and piecing together the world in new forms—in short, for creating assemblages. Our collaboration begins in creating a laboratory (within and as part of Kamel Farms) for a participatory art project that invites experimentation in the sensible, in the arranging of material and social conditions between humans and nonhumans, living and not living. These sensible relations will take on a diversity of forms, each relation itself being a particular mode within the reassembling of sensible life. It is a project guided by the idea that one of the obstacles within art/anthropology collaborations concerns where experimentation is to take place. For artists working with participatory or socially engaged art practices, exper-

imentation is found in creating unforeseen social relations that are site specific. In this project, the artwork is the sensible relations created by participants in Kamel Farms, “those unexpected situations, unforeseen relations, unconventional and unprecedented associations and communities in a particular location” (Sansi 2015, 2) that prefigure living the future now. Following Sansi, the aim here is to bring the full weight of artistic experimentation into anthropology to think “how fieldwork, as a form of practice, constitutes social relations” (43) and to map a “post-relational” art/anthropology wherein these two practices are mutually constitutive (Sansi 2018, 202; see also Pedersen 2012). In this sense, such art/anthropology collaborations bring the full weight of multimodality as method into play by underscoring the excess within given relations and, in turn, the plurality of ways of doing anthropology that Dattatreyan and Marrero-Guillamón call for in their introduction to this special series.

These collaborative speculations or worldings, as emergent landscapes/assemblages, involve working with Palestinians in their refusals of the settler-colonial project of sensible colonization, of dispossession and elimination from the land. As Nasser eloquently concludes of his first foray into returning to the land of Palestine as a farmer: “The experience has been sublime, by which I mean that smelling spring’s petrichor as I descend my fingers into the soft of the soil is the crossing of a threshold” (Rego 2016; Figure 5). Our ambition is to offer a space for such crossings.

Kiven Strohm  Department of Sociology, National University of Singapore, Singapore; kiven.strohm@nus.edu.sg

NOTES

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Workshop, Hong Kong Baptist University (2018), Graduate Student Workshop, Department of Sociology, National University of Singapore (2018), International Sociological Association, Toronto, Canada (2018), Centre for Critical Heritage Studies, School of Global Studies, University of Gothenburg (2018). Funding for this research was generously provided by the National University of Singapore (Startup Grant), and The American University in Cairo (Mellon Postdoctoral Fellowship).

1. For a similar account of driving to Iqrit and the sensory politics it embodies, see Bishara (2015).
2. Since 1999, Palestinians in Israel have come together to organize visits to former (and often destroyed) Palestinian villages and towns as part of Nakba Day commemorations (Sorek 2015). Known as the March of Return (Maseerat al'Awda), these events have sought to sustain the continuing connections of Palestinians with the land but also as a community living under settler-colonial violence. The summer camps in Iqrit, which predate the organization of the annual March of Return, were an important inspiration for their creation.
3. As part of these returns, the Palestinian electronic music collective Checkpoint 303 collaborated with members of the village to produce *The Iqrit Files*: <http://checkpoint303.free.fr/TheIqritFiles.html>.
4. For the significance of landscape within Manal's work, see Jonathan Harris's (2017) recent commentary on her exhibition at Manjma Culture Lab in Haifa.
5. Here our project draws on and develops the affinities between permaculture farming and art practice. As Vivien Sansour, head of Palestine Heirloom Society and permacultural farmer intriguingly put it: "Farmers are scientists and artists at the same time. In order for them to develop what we eat, they have to ask questions and make observations. They also have to imagine new possibilities and try them out, which is what artists do" (Leifer 2018).
6. Tina Camp's powerful work on photography within black diaspora in *Listening to Images* has gifted me a number of important conceptual forms for thinking with colonial situations such as Palestine, notably fugitive practices of refusal, reassemblage in dispossession, and black feminist futurity. I want to thank Deborah A. Thomas for pointing me to the importance of Camp's work for thinking this project.
7. Notable exceptions are Bardenstein (1999), Bishara (2015), Braverman (2009), Meneley (2014), and Sharif (2014).
8. Za'atar is a plant and a spice (a mix of thyme, toasted sesame seeds, and sumac) and also has been traditionally used as a medicine, among other things. Along with olives, poppies, and oranges, it has become a key symbol within the Palestinian national narrative (Abufarha 2008).
9. Central to this claim within the Zionist settler-colonial project is that the land of Palestine was barren and wild, untamed and largely empty until Zionist settlers modernized it and made the desert bloom (see Shehadeh 2007). Throughout this article, land will refer to a bounded area, such as a farm or village.
10. This sensible colonization is not limited to za'atar, but is also found in the appropriation of various Palestinian and Arab foods

such as hummus, falafel, maftoul, sahlab (Ranta and Mendel 2014). It also can be evidenced in the laws that forbid the use, in any form, of the colors of the Palestinian flag throughout the 1970s and 1980s to more recent laws seeking to quell the "noise pollution" of mosques in Israel (Schwarz 2014), among others. For an important historical examination of the colonial remaking of land in Palestine, see Tesdell (2013).

11. Lila Sharif (2014) provides an insightful account of the connection between food, eating, tasting, and land among Palestinians.
12. I point here to Michael Taussig's (1991, 147–48) reminder of Nietzsche's "notion of the senses as bound to their object as much as their organs of reception, a fluid bond to be sure in which, as he say, 'seeing becomes seeing something.'"
13. Village memorial books are documentary histories based on accounts of villagers from the more than four hundred Palestinian villages cleansed and, in many cases, destroyed with the creation of the state of Israel. As Davis explains, they are evidence of the existence of these former villages. See also Slyomovics (1998).
14. I want to thank Ayah Abo-Basha for noting this point.
15. For the Zionist vision of the landscape of Palestine/Israel, see Long (2001).
16. I had originally met Nasser in 2010 when doing fieldwork for my PhD. At the time, he had been working for Adalah, a Palestinian NGO in Haifa, as a PhD student in law. Nasser defended his PhD in October 2018, Mabrouk ya Nasser!
17. As Nasser recounted: "Goa is where I did my PDC—Permaculture Design Course—and is also where I executed a 'living laboratory' project with college students of agriculture from the only agriculture college in Goa, Don Bosco College of Agriculture (in Sulcorna, Goa) and affiliated with Goa University."
18. Nasser had previously started a small farm in Saffuriya. See Rego (2016).
19. In 2018, Nasser finally found the land to start his permaculture farm, Kamel Farms: <http://www.kamelfarms.org/>.
20. Here I am referring to artists working broadly within the ethnographic turn in contemporary art and their use fieldwork techniques as part of their artistic practice. See Coles (2000) and Schneider and Wright (2006, 2010).
21. The exhibition took place from June 5 to August 10, 2017, and was curated by Rula Khoury: <http://www.galleryone.ps/portfolio-item/sensorial-immunity/>.
22. The project appeals to participatory or social art practices in which the artwork is the social situation that can be relational, activist, or antagonistic (Finkelpearl 2014). To be sure, collaborative and participatory art are never entirely innocent projects, both potentially reproducing various forms of exclusion and "artificial hells" (see Bishop 2012; Miessen 2011; Sansi 2015). Such concerns are especially acute for anthropologists who confront similar ethical questions within their fieldwork practices.

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